DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 204 448 UD 021 509

AUTHOR Ijaz, M. Ahmed
TITLE Study on Ethnic Attitudes of Elementary School Children Toward Blacks and East Indians. A Report to the Scarborough Board of Education.
PUB DATE Feb 81
NOTE 31p.: For a related document, see UD 021 560.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change: Black Students: *Change Strategies: *Cultural Awareness: Cultural Images: Elementary Education: Elementary School Students: Folk Culture: Foreign Countries: *Indians: Multicultural Education: *Racial Attitudes: Racial Bias: Racial Relations: Student Attitudes: *White Students
IDENTIFIERS Canada

ABSTRACT

A study of the ethnic attitudes of white fifth and sixth graders in elementary schools in Scarborough, Ontario, Canada, revealed highly negative racial attitudes toward blacks and East Indians. It was concluded that traditional educational measures were ineffective in promoting positive racial attitudes. In response to these findings, 170 students participated in a cultural program that focused on East Indian folk dance, music, and crafts. Children's ethnic attitudes were tested prior to the implementation of the program, immediately after its conclusion, and three months later. Parents' occupational status was found to be associated in some cases with children's racial attitudes. The program resulted in significantly improved racial attitudes toward East Indians. In this paper, a description and outline of the cultural program are provided as are recommendations for improving cultural education.
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ED204448

STUDY ON ETHNIC ATTITUDES OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN TOWARD BLACKS AND EAST INDIANS

A Report to the

Scarborough Board of Education

February 1981

M. Ahmed Ijaz Ed.D.

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OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Objectives

The present study had two main objectives:

1. It was to investigate and compare the nature of racial attitudes in fifth- and sixth-grade White Canadian children* toward Blacks and East Indians in two high-density (Hi D) and two low-density (Lo D) schools in Scarborough.

2. It was to implement a "cultural" program focusing on various aspects of the East Indian culture, both in one Hi D school and one Lo D school, in order to influence children's racial attitudes towards East Indians in a positive direction.

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*Note: These included white Caucasian children of white parents who were born in Canada with English as their first language, and children of white British parents who were either born in Canada or Britain and who had English as their first language.

Theoretical Framework

On the basis of the "contact theory" and the theory of conformity proneness it was hypothesized that children attending Hi D schools would show more favourable attitudes towards members of the black and East Indian minority groups than those attending Lo D schools. Moreover, based on the theoretical framework of Triandis' theory of "subjective culture", it was hypothesized that the implementation of a cultural program focusing on the "subjective culture" of the East Indian minority group would result in improved racial attitudes among White Canadian children toward that minority group.

1. The Contact Theory

Previous research findings on attitude change as a result of interethnic contact are inconsistent and inconclusive. While Koslin, Amarel and Amarel (1969), Jansen and Gallagher (1966), Mann (1959), and Singer (1964) ascertained attitude change in school children as a result of interethnic contact, no such change was found by Kupferer (1954), Lombardi (1963), Smith (1969) and Wade and Wilson (1971). Other researchers (Beecher, 1970, cited in Wineberg, 1970; Webster, 1961) even noted more prejudice following interethnic contact than before.

Previous findings seem to suggest, however, that close contact and regular social interaction between majority and minority group members may result in improved ethnic attitudes provided some or all of the following criteria are met (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1976; Cook, 1969):

1. equal status of interacting individuals;
2. support of interethnic contact by persons and/ or institutions in authority positions;
3. an opportunity for genuine acquaintance potential (i.e., interethnic contact has to occur on a personal rather than on a casual basis);
4. intergroup contact has to be experienced as pleasant and rewarding;
5. the contact situation has to provide interdependent activities and common superordinate goals which can only be achieved by intergroup cooperation.

2. The Conformity Theory

The theory of conformity proneness holds that group norms prevailing in a society are largely responsible for a person's values, social attitudes and behaviour. Conformity to group norms supplies the individual with feelings of "group belongingness and group anchorage" (Williams, 1964, p. 219). Ethnic attitudes, like other

social attitudes, are learned and vary with socio-cultural, situational and personality differences. A child's ethnic attitudes may be acquired through straight transmission of values from adults, older siblings, and peers. They may be based on direct observation of inter-racial events which cast the members of an ethnic group in a negative light, or they may develop through subtle and unconscious assimilation of the values prevailing in his social and cultural environment.

On the basis of the contact theory and the conformity theory it was assumed that a school situation which would favour racial integration and close inter-ethnic contact, both in all aspects of students' and teachers' everyday interaction and through the overt support and immediate example of persons in authority positions (e.g., teachers, principal, parents), would be more likely to promote favourable ethnic attitudes than a school situation where an opportunity for physical inter-ethnic contact is not provided, either due to the absence of a sufficiently large number of students belonging to the respective minority group(s) or because social norms are felt to be present that are in favour of racial discrimination.

3. The Theory of "Subjective Culture"

Empirical evidence regarding the effect of education on changing ethnic attitudes is inconsistent and inconclusive. Previous research findings suggest that educational measures focusing exclusively on the imparting of knowledge about another ethnic group or on the nature of prejudice are relatively unsuccessful in promoting positive ethnic attitudes and in bringing about attitudinal change. However, instructional programs which provide majority group members with an opportunity to identify with members of the minority group through "vicarious experiences" in the target culture have been found to be more likely to engender positive intergroup attitudes.

> The relative absence of clear-cut findings in this area may appear somewhat puzzling... since strong common sense notions exist that increased knowledge about other groups should elicit more positive attitudes. The actual experimental evidence, however, is not convincing (Katz,1976, p.223).

Triandis (1976) proposes to reduce interethnic prejudice and conflict through an educational approach that is based on the notion of "subjective culture". It presumes that each cultural group has a specific "subjective culture", i.e., a "characteristic way of perceiving the man-made part of its environment... The perception of rules and the group's norms, roles and values are aspects

of the subjective culture"(1972, p.4). According to Triandis (1975), intercultural conflict is largely based on a lack of understanding of each other's subjective cultures. "Cultures differ in the amount of differentiation that characterize them" (p.45). This differentiation may vary among and within modes of exchange, and in the concept of time. Persons who come from societies with different levels of differentiation will have difficulties communicating with each other because they are likely to make wrong isomorphic attributions.*

Triandis (1975) suggests the use of cultural programs that place a prime focus on the imparting of information regarding the nature and strength of the connections between norms, role structures and role perceptions, the expression of general intentions, common self-concepts, the evaluation of certain kinds of behaviours, common differentiations among types of people within and between modes of exchange, as well as across time and space, in the other culture.

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*Note: According to Triandis (1975) "isomorphic attributions" correspond to the idea "If I had been raised in that culture and had the kinds of experiences that he has had, I would do exactly what he did" (p.41).

Triandis and his associates developed the so-called "cultural assimilator", a programmed technique of cultural training in the subjective culture, which is designed to improve isomorphic attributions toward a particular cultural group. They found that in adults such training produced not only a greater understanding of basic value and belief systems and of the non-verbal behaviour of members of the target culture, but also an improvement in intergroup relations and greater success in intergroup activities.

On the basis of their findings, it was assumed that a similar kind of cultural program, adapted to the level of elementary school children, might be able to bring about an improvement in inter-ethnic relations among them by providing a better understanding of general norms and values prevailing in the other culture.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Altogether 170 White Canadian students and 152 students belonging to other ethnic groups (8 Grade 5 and 8 Grade 6 classes) in two high-density (Hi D) and two low-density (Lo D) schools in Scarborough participated in the study. High-density as opposed to low-density schools were defined as schools in which thirty and eleven percent respectively of the school population belonged to the black and East Indian ethnic groups. These two contrasting situations, although arbitrarily designated as 'High' and Low' density, are believed to represent the two extremes in the composition of the student population in the Scarborough elementary schools with respect to these two ethnic groups.

A cultural program (Appendix) consisting of nine weekly sessions of approximately seventy minutes' duration each and focussing on various aspects of the East Indian culture through dance, music and crafts was implemented. The program provided information and knowledge about India, however, not in the traditional classroom fashion of "input" followed by "recall": the prime strategy employed by the instructor was to immerse the children into situations that were typical of the Indian culture, to elucidate the meaning and significance of activities performed in these situations while,

simultaneously, providing an opportunity for the children to identify with members of the target culture through role playing. Finally, the values reflected in the customs and traditions of the Indian culture were related to similar values in the children's own culture and in other parts of the world.

In other words, "content" was imparted and analyzed, i.e., it was "received" by the children at the cognitive/rational level of their consciousness, but at the same time, the children were provided with an opportunity to "experience" the content at the emotional and affective level through role playing, singing, dancing and a variety of physical activities. Thus the children were placed into a situation where they could absorb typical aspects of the target culture through cognitive, verbal, semi-verbal, non-verbal and emotional channels. In short, learning was not confined to "intellect", but involved all aspects of the learners' personalities, rational, emotional, affective, and physical. Finally, the "learning content" was related to their own culture through "transfer" of the values inherent in it, and thus provided meaningful application to their own lives.

The program was implemented in two Grade Five and two Grade Six classes, with one each from a Hi D and a Lo D school (experimental group). The control group

consisted of six Grade Five and six Grade Six classes with half of each belonging to Hi D schools and the other half to Lo D schools.

The children's ethnic attitudes were tested prior to the implementation of the program, immediately after its conclusion, and three months after its completion. Three measures were employed: the Semantic Differential Measure, the Bogardus Social Distance Scale and a Contact Questionnaire based on the one used by Henry (1978).

III. MAJOR FINDINGS

a) The Nature of Ethnic Attitudes

1. No significant differences in attitudes toward Blacks and East Indians were found among White Canadian students in high-density and low-density schools.

2. The ethnic attitudes of White Canadian children toward Blacks and East Indians were found to be highly negative, significantly more negative than toward any of the other ethnic concepts surveyed (White Canadians, Canadians, French Canadians, Italian Canadians, German Canadians).

3. Children whose mothers were "housewives" and/or whose fathers were "professionals" showed greater social distance toward Blacks than those of parents in other occupations.

4. Children whose mothers were "housewives" revealed more negative cognitions of Indian Canadians than those of mothers with other occupations, but this difference did not hold true with respect to Blacks and Pakistani Canadians.

5. The length of time of knowing a black or East Indian friend was not found to be a significant variable for the

attitudes of White Canadian children toward Blacks and East Indians.

6. Both in Hi D schools and Lo D schools significantly less overall interaction occurred between White Canadian and East Indian students than between White Canadians and Blacks. While the Hi D schools had proportionately one third more East Indian students than Blacks, less than one third of the number of White Canadian children who reported having a black friend and meeting him/her frequently outside school reported the same with regard to an East Indian friend. Less than one half of the number of students who had visited or invited a black friend home reported the same about an East Indian friend.

7. Students aged eleven revealed significantly less social distance toward Blacks than ten- and twelve-year-olds, however, no such difference was noted with regard to attitudes toward East Indians.

8. Students belonging to other ethnic groups evaluated Blacks and East Indians in essentially the same fashion as White Canadian students.

9. Members of the black and East Indian minority groups

evaluated their own ethnic groups considerably less positively than did White Canadian children, both in their cognitions of their own ethnic group(s) and in terms of social distance.

10. Social interaction of White Canadian students and students belonging to other ethnic groups with Blacks and East Indians which involved mutual visits to each other's homes was accompanied by feelings of less social distance.

The Effect of the Program

1. The implementation of the cultural program resulted in significantly improved attitudes toward East Indians in all students exposed to it, regardless of age, grade, sex, ethnicity, and whether they attended a Hi D or Lo D school.

2. In East Indian students the program produced improved attitudes toward their own ethnic group.

3. The effects of the program were maintained three months after its completion.

(For a detailed analysis and discussion of the findings see Ijaz, 1980, pp. 134-175.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings the following recommendations are proposed to the Scarborough Board of Education.

1. That the Scarborough Board undertake to develop programs similar to the one implemented in this study with a focus on the medium of the arts and appealing simultaneously to the students' affective and cognitive levels of experience.

2. That programs focusing on various ethnic groups (visible minority groups for a start) be developed and that they be tailored to suit different age groups of students.

3. That the Board hire at least two suitably qualified persons belonging to the above two minority groups to help with the development of such programs, their implementation and the training of Scarborough teachers to implement such programs themselves.

4. That initially such programs be implemented on a small scale in selected Scarborough schools and that they be systematically evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in developing and/or changing children's ethnic attitudes in a positive direction.

5. That existing Multicultural Studies programs developed by the Scarborough Board be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in promoting positive ethnic attitudes.

6. That the seminars currently held by the Scarborough Board to sensitize teachers to problems in race relations be expanded.

7. That such seminar sessions

a) provide information about various minority group cultures;

b) create awareness of specific problems that minority group students typically experience due to cultural differences and racism;

c) offer suggestions to remedy and/or effectively cope with such problems;

d) provide information about attitude development in both minority and majority group children and stress the importance of fostering positive ethnic attitudes at an early age.

8. That all Scarborough teachers participate in such sessions.

9. That the Board set up a forum to share ideas and

strategies employed by other Boards of Education in the areas of race relations and multiculturalism.

10. That the Board undertake an intensive research program to determine the ethnic attitudes of Scarborough students from Kindergarten through Grade 13 and optimum age levels for introducing educational measures designed to develop positive interethnic attitudes.

11. That the Board set up a Department of Multiculturalism under the direction of a suitably qualified individual to oversee the development, organization, and implementation of new multicultural programs, the evaluation of existing and new programs, teacher training in the area of multiculturalism, and research in representative groups of students of all age levels.

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Appendix

The Cultural Program

The cultural program used in this study had four objectives:

1) to provide knowledge and information about the East Indian culture;

2) to elicit understanding of a number of aspects of the East Indian culture;

3) to create an awareness of similarities and differences between cultures and of the origins of cultural diversity;

4) to emphasize that apparent cultural differences essentially constitute differential manifestations of similar human values.

Instruction focused on cultural aspects as reflected in the arts such as music, dance, and crafts. The teaching method used was predominantly based on a combined activity and experience approach. Role-playing played an important part in all aspects of the program, since it was viewed as the most effective means for identification with members and typical situations of the target culture. Topics discussed - and recurring throughout the program - centred around three major areas: folk dance, folk motifs and children's games,

e.g.:

- Origins and sources of folk dance (e.g. seasonal variations and related festivities, religious celebrations, different occupations, etc.);
- Folk dance as a reflection of a nation's culture (e.g. social roles and relationships, values, religion, etc.);
- Folk motifs in art and crafts as a manifestation of cultural diversity;
- Typical East Indian folk motifs, their origin and meaning;
- Children's games and toys as reflecting cultural diversity;
- The relationship between a country's geographic, economic and social conditions and the nature of children's games and toys in that country.

General Outline of the Program

Session I

Theme: Introduction to Folk Dance

a) Discussion of the program - Overview

b) Introduction of simple dances from East and West, e.g. Frere Jacques (Canada) and Garba (simple version) from India.

c) The use of hand-gestures in Indian dances and in Ding-Dong Daddy, a Canadian novelty dance.

d) Teaching of Dandiya Raas, an Indian circle dance.

Session II

Theme: Dance as a Form of Seasonal Celebration

a) Rouf - a simple Indian dance which heralds the Spring after a long snow-bound winter in Kashmir.

b) Harvest dance from the Punjab, (India), A vigorous and spontaneous dance performed at the first full moon after the planting of the wheat crop.

c) Big Circle Dance (Canada)

d) Indian Corn Dance (Canada)

e) Review of the learned material and discussion.

Session III

Theme: Folk Motifs in Cultures and their Significance

a) Discussion

b) Display of Designs - (pictures, fabrics, artifacts)

c) Activities - making banners, pictures, valances etc. (lotus, peacock, mango, maple leaf, trillium).

Session IV

Theme: Work Dances

a) Fisherman's Dance - India

b) Weaving Dance - Canada

Session V

Theme: Games and Review

a) Chanting Games, e.g., Draw me a bucket of water - Canada; Aam Wala (The mango man) -India; Me store is Me store Miss Mary - Jamaica; Did you ever see a lonlegged sailor?

b) Activity Games: Different versions of "tag and blindman's buff".

c) Review of Dances

Session VI

Theme: Crafts

a) Construction of simple toys from India, e.g. bouncing birds, elephant, saree dressed dolls.

Sessions VII and VIII

Theme: Celebrations of Religious Festivals Around the World

Dances, stories and customs related to these celebrations e.g. "Divali" - Festival of Lights - India; Hanuka - Jewish Festival; and St.Lucia - Sweden.

Session IX

Integration of the learnt material and review.

TABLE 1

Comparison of Social Distance Responses
Toward the Three Ethnic Groups

Response	Ethnic Group		
	Black Canadians	Indian Canadians	Pakistani Canadians
Would not let them visit the country.	6.5%	7.7%	18.1%
Would not let them live in the country.	16.1%	24.4%	27.9%
Would not let them attend the same school.	22.6%	30.4%	35.5%
Would not let them live in the same neighborhood.	24.4%	35.1%	41.6%
Would not let them live next door.	35.1%	51.5%	56.6%
Would not let them play at their home.	40.2%	55.1%	62.0%
Would not let them come to a party at their house.	41.6%	56.3%	64.2%
Would not have them as their best friends.	46.1%	59.3%	65.5%
Would not marry them.	86.7%	90.3%	95.8%

TABLE 2

Comparison of Social Distance Responses
Whites Toward Blacks
And
Blacks Toward Whites

Whites Toward Blacks	Variable	Blacks Toward Whites
6.5%	Unwillingness to let them visit the country.	2.6%
16.1%	Unwillingness to let them live in the country.	5.3%
22.6%	Unwillingness to let them attend the same school.	5.3%
24.4%	Unwillingness to let them live in the same neighborhood.	5.3%
35.1%	Unwillingness to let them live next door.	7.9%
40.2%	Unwillingness to let them play at their home.	7.9%
41.6%	Unwillingness to let them come to a party.	13.2%
46.1%	Unwillingness to have them as their best friends.	13.2%
86.7%	Unwillingness to marry them.	47.4%

TABLE 3

Comparison of Social Distance Responses
Whites to Indian Canadians
And
East Indians Toward Whites

Whites Toward Indians	Variable	E. Indians Toward Whites
7.7%	Unwillingness to let them visit the country.	0%
24.4%	Unwillingness to let them live in the country.	0%
30.4%	Unwillingness to let them attend the same school.	0%
35.1%	Unwillingness to let them live in the same neighborhood.	3.0%
51.5%	Unwillingness to let them live next door.	3.0%
55.1%	Unwillingness to let them play at their home.	9.1%
56.3	Unwillingess to let them come to a party.	9.1%
59.3%	Unwillingness to have them as their best friends.	9.1%
90.3%	Unwillingness to marry them.	81.3%

TABLE 4

Comparison of Social Distance Responses
Before and After the Program
Whites Toward Indian Canadians

Response	Pre	Post
Willingness to let them visit the country.	92%	100%
Willingness to let them live in the country.	76%	94%
Willingness to let them attend the same school.	70%	90%
Willingness to let them live in the same neighborhood.	65%	83%
Willingness to let them live next door.	49%	79%
Willingness to let them play at their home.	45%	66%
Willingness to let them come to a party.	44%	64%
Willingness to have them as their best friends.	41%	60%
Willingness to marry them.	10%	15%